

Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

Meeting Notes for March 6, 2002

Agenda Items

- Schematic Design for Beacon Hill Station
- Design Development for Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel

Commissioners Present

Matthew Kitchen
Carolyn Law
Jay Lazerwitz
Jack Mackie
Don Royse
Mimi Sheridan
Paul Tomita

Staff Present

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit
Marty Curry, Planning Commission
Barbara Goldstein, Arts Commission
Cheryl Sizov, CityDesign
Kathy A Dockins, CityDesign

LRRP Business

In Rick's absence, Mimi Sheridan chaired the meeting. Cheryl Sizov provided a staff update on several items including:

- The 2002 LRRP meeting schedule;
- Status of MLK undergrounding proposal, Task Force work, and LRRP report; and
- Status of Beacon Hill Design Guidelines

Michael Richmond, RVTAC staff, added that the Mayor had campaigned on the issue of undergrounding, and that it would be useful for City Council to get a letter of support from LRRP, with copies to the Mayor and Sound Transit Board. He said that so far it appears Councilmembers Licata, McIver, and Conlin support undergrounding. He also reported on Seattle City Light's recent announcement of budget shortfall, and recapped undergrounding cost estimates as follows:

- Earlier City Light estimate of undergrounding was \$28-31 million
- Earlier Sound Transit estimate for their portion of the work was \$13 million
- The idea was to have the City cover the difference between the two costs
- Now it is thought that costs could go as high as \$40 million—everyone is concerned about the risk

Michael and Sally Clark both confirmed that while some community members are still opposed to the light rail project, there is substantial support—from all camps—for undergrounding utility wires.

Beacon Hill Schematic Design

Dan Corson, STart
David Klingston, OTAK
John Walser, Sound Transit

We are now at 30% design completion with the team of OTAK, Murase and Associates, and Dan Corson, artist. We will also be adding another artist later for the plaza artwork. There is a community presentation scheduled for March 28th. The rest of the schedule is as follows:

- 60% design by July 2002
- 90% design by November 2002
- 100% design in February 2003
- construction of headhouse and other systems elements??? June-September 2003
- construction of trackway??? November 2006 to May 2008
- operations starting mid 2009

So there is a period of 2-3 years where the headhouse will be sitting idle until system start-up.

We have had extensive art and architectural collaboration on this station design. The station is literally at the crest of the hill, 160 feet deep, and therefore will be serviced by elevators with no stairs (except emergency) or escalators. The context is quite mixed architecturally. Within close proximity of the station is a Larry's Red Apple market, El Centro de la Raza, and soon, the new Beacon Hill branch library. The commercial area contains a mix of small businesses, beyond which is single family housing of various styles.

During construction, we'll be taking the entire block for staging, thereby removing much of the existing context and setting the stage for future transit-oriented development (TOD). We are not sure what will happen with the property—which presents a challenge in that we are trying to design a station that works well and looks good independently as well as part of a larger complex of buildings later on if TOD occurs. Another important aspect of the context is that Beacon Avenue is a pedestrian overlay district zoned for up to four stories of housing.

The station itself has the following characteristics:

- Two shafts; one main set of elevators and a smaller auxiliary one for emergency access and venting
- Two headhouses; one in the plaza and one near the alley—the auxiliary shaft actually comes up in the middle of Lander street, but we'll just bring it to a basement level and then move it over to the alley and build the headhouse there
- Potential for TOD is greater if alley is moved slightly away from the intersection—this would create more buildable area
- Bus stops on either side of the street, paratransit at the station
- Architecturally, the headhouses are very different from the platforms—more traditional exterior in use of brick vs. glass, stainless steel at the platform. We want to acknowledge these differences in "exterior" vs. "interior" spaces, while still creating a design relationship between them.
- Main headhouse will be 35' tall, 28' wide, and 84' long—it is designed as an honest expression of what it is; a machine.
- Mechanical elements are flush or recessed; elevator doors are pushed and topped by a glass cantilevered canopy. Other canopies exist over the ticket vending machines, bike parking, and para-transit area. We've tried to create a hierarchy among the various canopies.
- Above the elevators is a "picture window" that will involve light and color in a kinetic way as people move up to and past the window; should serve as a literal beacon for the neighborhood. Elevator cab will have a light on top to illuminate the walls as the elevator moves up and down.
- The themes are ascent/descent, movement, verticality, infinity, space.
- Platform is a long slender space with a very different volume than the Downtown tunnel. Use of dark blue and neon lights perpendicular to the long glass wall. Still working on integrating the leaning rail, benches, flooring, ceiling, other light fixtures.

As the presentation concluded, Debora Ashland summarized the Sound Transit Internal Design Review team's comments as follows:

- Concern re: the extensive use of glass—it is durable, expensive? (Used in Europe extensively, and by the New York Port Authority)
- Etc. (Get list of comments from Debora?)

Discussion

- I really like the contemporary machine aesthetic, and don't believe this is an inappropriate fit with the neighborhood. The canopies, however, are confusing. I think the two on the front should be connected, although the part of the canopy over the ticket vending machines could still be smaller or otherwise differentiated from the main cover over the elevators if need be.
- I agree about the canopies. Also, contact Carlson Architects regarding the new branch library they are designing nearby—the library and this station will be a huge influence on future development in the neighborhood. Treat the entire area around the building as the pedestrian zone from the canopy down. The ceiling of the platform and the outside canopy(s) may want to become the same—or at least reference one another. Remember that the platform is also the pedestrian zone.
- The ceiling lighting at the platform seems inappropriate—too fussy, too residential. The dome lighting is too strong, or rather, the lighting emphasis there implies that that is where people congregate when in reality this is just a place where they pass through.
- All along the Panel has encouraged Sound Transit to reflect the character of the community in the design, but I don't see that here at all. This is a very ethnically diverse area and the design doesn't reflect that. *(We are very aware of that issue, and believe that the plaza will be a good place for collaboration with the community to occur. The streetscape is the place where the building will connect with the rest of the neighborhood. With respect to reflecting the community's cultural diversity, which culture would one choose to reflect? There are so many here, and they are changing all the time. We do have ethnically diverse artists involved, as well as community members in the art review process itself.)*
- What is the artist's scope? Simply put, will they be creating a "thing" or a "place?" *(More likely a thing that is visible from a distance.)*
- With respect to context, my recollection is that at most stations we've been reluctant to suggest Sound Transit be too literal about reflecting the cultural diversity of the Southeast community. We've recommended staying abstract. My own preference is for timeless, contemporary, machine-aesthetic, "clean" design for these headhouses.
- Yes, I've heard some complaints from the community that the Beacon Hill library draws too much from one culture.
- The pedestrian zone is so important here—even for people who will never even use light rail, but will walk past this station. Put the cultural expression there and let a "thing"/artwork emerge from the ground.
- The glass façade here will really glow and be a beacon for Beacon Hill.
- This is truly where god is in the details—if the "machine" headhouse is not detailed properly, it could be abysmal. We need to ensure that it isn't value-engineered into a different, and less quality, design.
- At the maintenance facility we really liked the lantern effect, and yet some of that—the art lighting—has been value-engineered out of the design. Yes, there is a fear of losing key elements here too. We need a level of commitment on this. *(We are actually beyond formal value engineering at this point; we did it two weeks ago. And truthfully, the architectural finishes are such a small component of the budget, that the VE team didn't even have anything to say about it. They are focused on saving money on the boring of the tunnel and shafts. Our current estimates say that we can afford this design.)*
- With respect to the glass along the platform below, I think the strength is in having it the entire length. Don't break it up into segments or panels interspersed with other materials. I like the way the

glass reflects the blue across on the wall, and the interplay between both. The spaces associated with coming down in the elevator feel unresolved. A strong sense of arrival is important.

- I am very supportive of the design. The use of brick is important here. Do develop the pedestrian areas more, as well as the area in front of the elevators—they need texture. I like the scale of the fabric/glass panels. I notice that the street elevators have a verticality, while the platform emphasizes horizontality. The north side of the headhouse isn't resolved and neither is the view of the headhouse from Beacon Avenue. It isn't inviting enough.
- I would like to see how the other building's stairwell is articulated. I agree with the IDR that the sliver of TOD should be developed to have a better relationship to the headhouse. Plaza design is critical here. I like the design of the headhouse, but feel uncomfortable with it as a foreign object plopped down at this location. The para-transit seems too far from the curb—why not bring it out closer to the street with a separate canopy? That might also resolve some of the "canopy confusion" that is occurring at the main building. Introducing stainless steel—another material—also seems to be confusing and lead to lack of continuity. Ditto with the wainscoting and the flooring—what happens there? What is the relationship to other components?
- I disagree with something you said about the platform being the realm of the train—it is the realm of the pedestrian too! And the train is in that pedestrian realm; not vice-versa.
- I've been spending lots of time in this community and I see that brick is used a lot there. But I reiterate another comment that detailing is critical here; it can't be done slapdash and be effective.
- I really enjoy the otherworldliness of the spaces; they feel slightly dangerous—in a good way. Just be careful that they are dangerous/exciting and not truly dangerous/unsafe and off-putting to passengers.
- I too like the "edginess" of this design. This is the most adventurous of all the station designs we've seen yet, and I like it. Don't get too safe!
- I enjoy the ascent/descent theme, but would like to see more details about the experience of riding in the elevator cab next time.

Action

The Panel recommended approval of the headhouse and platform design as presented, citing particular support for the successful integration of art and architecture, and the adventurousness of the design. The Panel was not able to recommend approval or disapproval of the plaza design, given its incompleteness at this time. The Panel expressed the following concerns and comments for consideration by the design team for the next phase of design:

- **Pedestrian zone:** *The entire plaza area, the spaces below the canopies, and the platform need to be understood as the pedestrian zone, and designed accordingly with attention to pedestrian use, comfort, and scale.*
- **Plaza/TOD relationship:** *The location and configuration of the potential TOD area is critical to the success of the plaza, and vice-versa. In particular, the shape and size of the potential building(s) adjacent to the smaller auxiliary headhouse need more work. Views to and from the plaza need to be considered in its design, particularly from Beacon Avenue to the plaza.*
- **Canopies:** *The exterior headhouse canopies need further development to improve clarity of design and function. The Panel recommends combining the two canopies at the front as one extended canopy; differentiate the uses beneath them through means other than separate canopies. Consider bringing para-transit out from the headhouse and into the plaza closer to the street, with its own canopy.*
- **Materials and detailing:** *The choice and detailing of materials will be critical to the success of the station, given the risk that cost cutting or poor workmanship could destroy the character and essence of the design. The glass below on the platform should be consistent with the glass above*

at the elevator façade. Think carefully before introducing additional materials such as the stainless steel. Provide more detail/texture on the elevator doors and refine the design of the entire elevator area, above and below.

Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel

Greg Ball, Sound Transit

Mike Williams, Sound Transit

As you know, last November 1st, the Sound Transit Board elected to move forward with joint bus/rail operations in the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel. We are now proceeding with a design to retrofit the tunnel for joint use; this retrofit does not include use of the Convention Place Station initially, but may later—depending on the route chosen for North Link. The track is being lowered to create a 14" curb height. What has made this joint operation possible, is the ability of the signal and communications system to safely separate buses and trains in transit. Surface volumes will be the same as today. Sound Transit is providing \$13.5 million for various surface improvements, including items such as parking only lanes, new bus shelters, street security personnel, and other operational and physical issues.

Retrofitting of the four existing stations is in progress. The scope is simply to bring these stations into the "family" of Link stations using the tactile edge, the braid, information and signage, ticket vending machines, and other functional changes. The signage really needs to be comprehensive for both Sound Transit and Metro, and not read as two systems side by side. Other mechanical elements such as fans will also be enlarged and/or upgraded. We are sensitive to working these changes carefully into the existing fabric of artwork and design. In some places, we'll be sandblasting the braid into existing granite. We want the passenger to be comfortable using the system.

Discussion

- At the International Station, I am concerned with your proposal to place an information panel in front of the origami artwork. This will fundamentally change the design of that space, and is an unacceptable intervention. *(We are placing the information panel forward of the artwork in order not to disturb it, but still to provide consistency for the blind community in always having station elements in the same location at a station.)* My work with the ADA community in San Jose indicates that consistency is not the hard and fast rule that you suggest. *(I am confident we can rethink this. At Westlake, we aren't putting the panels there because of the disturbance it would create for the artwork—so we're already breaking our consistency rule once. We would prefer to have fewer exceptions to the rule, but if necessary can adjust...)* Yes, I feel strongly that this is a place where the panel should be relocated.
- In a retrofit, exceptions are acceptable. Are you re-engaging the original artists in this work? I would encourage early discussion with them. *(Another assumption we're working with is the need for 70% contrast in signage for legibility. The University and Westlake stations existing signage meet that standard, but the other two do not.)* Could the old and new signs co-exist?
- Yes, I agree that we should keep the old signs. *(We do feel that Westlake is like a sacred place to people! And that we shouldn't slavishly apply a rule.)*
- Maintaining the integrity of the artwork should be accorded a higher priority than consistency with other rules and design directions.
- Don't target the artwork as the "villain" in the retrofit; don't single it out.

With that, the discussion concluded. There was no formal action taken, but the Panel asked that comments from the discussion—particularly the request to relocate the information panel at the International District station—be addressed by Sound Transit.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 6:30 pm.